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SUBJECT: HCMC ARCHDIOCESE ENCOUNTERS RESISTANCE AS IT TRIES TO EXPAND
HIV/AIDS ACTIVITIES

REF: HCMC 757; B) 05 HCMC 1152

¶1. (SBU) On August 28, HCMC CDCRep and PolOff met with Father John Dinh Toai, head of the HCMC Catholic Archdiocese "Pastoral Care" HIV/AIDS network to review the status of cooperation with local authorities. Toai told us that the church is able to conduct its HIV/AIDS activities with the tacit, unofficial support of the city government and the People's AIDS Committee (PAC). This includes operation of its community-based center for mothers and children with HIV/AIDS (see reftels for more information on the archdiocese's HIV/AIDS activities). Officials from the PAC, the coordinator for the city's HIV/AIDS strategy, often run interference with local officials to facilitate church operations. For example, the mother and children's center often faces hostile questioning and threats of closure or expulsion of residents from local police and administrative officials that the PAC is able to defuse.

¶2. (SBU) Toai complained that the Pastoral Care network has failed to receive HCMC government support to register and legalize its operations. For example, in 2005, the Archdiocese sought to register the women and children's center as a "Charitable Social Organization." Legal registration would facilitate the church's ability to provide services for the center's clients -- including enrolling children in school and providing medical care. Legal registration would eliminate episodic local harassment and would also facilitate the church's ability to relocate the center in the future. Toai explained that, as a legal entity, the center would be able to rent or purchase land. Toai complained that the paperwork continues to bounce around between various HCMC provincial-level departments, including the PAC.

¶3. (SBU) Toai noted that doctors and other staff affiliated with the Pastoral Care network also have been unable to benefit from technical support and seminars sponsored by international donors, but coordinated and run through the PAC. The PAC issues the invitations and Pastoral Care staff are not invited, Toai said. The PAC then issues training certificates to the participants. As the PAC demands that those involved in HIV/AIDS care be properly trained and certified as part of its legal registration process, the Pastoral Care network suffers a double whammy.

¶4. (SBU) Toai also has discussed with HCMC officials the desire of the Archdiocese to register the Pastoral Care network as a local NGO, in part, to facilitate the archdiocese receiving funding from international sources. Toai noted that European donors such as Caritas Norway told him that they could only provide the network with funding were it to be registered legally. However, he could never get a straight answer from city officials on how to apply. Toai acknowledged that CARE has been able to provide Pastoral Care limited funding along with other local partners, but PACCOM, the GVN's international NGO administrator, reportedly prevented Catholic Relief Services

from providing targeted funding specifically to Pastoral Care.

15. (SBU) Another Pastoral Care HIV/AIDS initiative, the Archdiocese's plan to create an integrated, community-based HIV/AIDS care center in HCMC, also is languishing because of bureaucratic difficulties, Toai stated. The city has told the church that they would not even begin to consider the project unless the church could first demonstrate that they had the land and the funding to carry out the project. However, on multiple occasions, local officials refused to approve the church from buying property once they learned that it would be used for an HIV/AIDS center. DOLISA staff offered the church property belonging to one of its officials in an isolated location and at inflated prices; the church demurred.

16. (SBU) Comment: HCMC officials seem to be in uncharted regulatory waters when it comes to legally registering a local NGO -- faith based or not -- to provide social services. However, HCMC officials could find ways of enhancing the operation of church activities and facilitating its participation in HIV/AIDS activities. The goals of the authorities and the church in this area are congruent. HCMC officials appear reluctant to empower a domestic non-governmental organization outside of the Communist Party's mass mobilization organization, the Fatherland Front. End Comment.

WINNICK